

USA

BRASS KNUCKLES FOR AMERICA

Claudia Wright on the man tipped to replace Kirkpatrick

Washington

FOR SOMEONE with a reputation as the Reagan Administration's best rhetorician, Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick managed to talk herself out of her job at the United Nations and her place in government with unexpected clumsiness. Retired Major-General Vernon Walters, the leading candidate to replace Kirkpatrick certainly lacks her gift for hyperbole.

Whereas Kirkpatrick delighted in taunting her audience with advocacy of military mayhem, coups d'état, and invasions by US forces or their surrogates in Africa, Asia and the Middle East — in a friendly valediction the *Washington Post* said she 'spoke for freedom' — Walters has said almost nothing in public, while helping to orchestrate most of the Administration's clandestine operations. Walters's candidacy for the UN post carries an unusual cachet: directly or indirectly, he has been involved in overthrowing more governments than any other official still serving in the US government.

Now 67 years old and a confirmed bachelor, Walters joined the US army when America joined the war in 1941 and was promoted steadily from Private to Major-General. After early language training in Catholic boarding schools in England and France, he became proficient in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Dutch and Russian. For the most part he functioned as a high-level interpreter and military attaché, working through the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), rather than the CIA. In May 1972, however, President Nixon made him deputy director of the CIA, where he remained, through the arrival and departure of a new President and four CIA directors, until August 1976. For the period of the Carter Administration, he was in the private consulting and arms business. In 1981 he was named by General Alexander Haig as ambassador-at-large in the State Department.

By his own account and those of others who either worked with or against him in the intelligence bureaucracy, Walters was involved in the 1953 Anglo-American putsch that overthrew the Iranian government of Mohammed Mossadegh and replaced the young Shah on his throne. In the early 60s, as military attaché in Rome, he was closely involved with the Italian intelligence service and with blocking the Kennedy Administration's 'opening' towards the Italian Left. In 1964 he helped facilitate the military coup that deposed the Brazilian government of Joao Goulart and replaced him with Walters's wartime military companion, General Castelo Branco. In 1967 he toured (but didn't serve in) South Vietnam extensively, calling the war 'one



Camera Press

General Walters: poor boy made powerful

of the noblest and most unselfish wars in which the United States had ever participated... it was in a sense the Tenth Crusade.' From 1967 to 1972 he was military attaché in Paris and intermediary for Henry Kissinger in secret contacts with the North Vietnamese and Chinese. Through his close relations with the French military and intelligence, he established himself as the man the francophone African dictators turned to when they needed help from Washington. In 1973 he was involved in the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende. In 1975 he oversaw US and French clandestine support for the anti-government insurgents in Angola and has since been a strong supporter of Jonas Savimbi's Unita movement.

On political assassination Walters claims to be as fastidiously opposed as he has been to illicit sex. In his autobiography he recounts that one of his duties as a young liaison officer between American and French forces in Rabat, Morocco, in 1942 was policing the local brothels to ensure that US soldiers left punctually at 10pm, when the French took over. He says that one French madame offered him a complimentary prostitute or glimpse through the see-through mirrors. 'Madame', Walters protested, declining both offers, 'there is the dignity of the country which I represent'.

During his time at the CIA, the Agency was implicated in the murder of Salvador Allende and of Allende's foreign minister, Orlando Letelier (who was assassinated in Washington a few weeks after Walters had retired). Years later, after US prosecutors had accused senior officials of DINA, the Chilean intelligence agency, of planning the killing, Walters conceded that he had known the Chileans but had no idea of their plan for Letelier. 'I have always been against political killings for three reasons', he told a Congressional subcommittee in March 1981. 'They are against the law of god; they are against the law of man; and they don't work.' In this case, he suggested, there was no doubt that Letelier 'was receiving money from the Cuban intelligence service', but the assassination only served to worsen relations with the Pinochet government on whom Walters counted for help in combatting the 'projection of Soviet power around the world' and in 'the defence of the shipping lanes in the Southeast Pacific and in the South Atlantic'.

People like Walters can only be understood in

terms of the traumatic impact on them of a sudden spell of 'downward social mobility'. Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, even Ronald Reagan, endured the humiliation as young men of falling below what they thought of as their 'rightful' economic status, resulting in a belief in the ethic of 'personal success' and in violent hatred of the Left. In Walters's case, his father lost his fortune in the Depression. His son was forced to start work as a teenage officeboy in an insurance company. Unlike most of the intelligence community he would later meet during the war in the Office of Strategic Studies, or afterwards in the CIA, Walters lacked Ivy League credentials — and was Roman Catholic to boot.

His career success he attributes, therefore, to a triumph of personal will over all obstacles. He reads history in the same way and is obsessed by Communism and the Soviet Union — the personal adversary of his lifetime. While others were 'soft' — 'pious dupes of the new left' he has called them — he has been 'hard'. His success proves in his view who has been the wiser. He fantasises about the existence, deeply buried within the Kremlin, of 'a superb mechanism for coordinating [Soviet strategy] and playing it like an organ, the right notes when they want at the right places and the right time'. Walters concedes that it is not foreign Communists who can defeat US policy. 'If our enemies are to win, then America must be stopped from within.' The Congressional and press investigations of the CIA in the mid-70s were for Walters a failure of American will. 'If we use kid gloves and they use brass knuckles, he has written, 'then our way of life and with it human freedom will stand in very great danger'.

FRANCE

COMMUNISTS LOSE THEIR BASE

John Eisenhower reports on this week's PCF Congress

CONGRESSES OF THE FRENCH Communist party since the war have been largely 'high masses', where the faithful congregate in a celebration of ritual and shared conviction, receiving the truth from on high. This time, however, delegates to the 25th PCF congress, now meeting at Saint-Ouen (6-10 February), find themselves at a much more troubled and turbulent gathering. The aura of certainty and almost military obedience which once characterised the party have gone.

Many local cells have disappeared; activists no longer regularly attend meetings and marches; the claimed membership of 610,000 is more like 200,000, if not less; the latest opinion polls credit the party with a mere 10 per cent of the vote, half the level of six years ago. A once mighty machine is in danger of becoming a marginal force in French politics.

The Communists' experience in government with the majority Socialists was an unhappy one, especially after the Mitterrand government's brutal switch in 1982 from a policy of economic expansion to one of